

STATEMENT BY PIEDMONT CITY COUNCILMAN JEFF WIELER

Our August 21 City Council meeting was a very difficult meeting for me and I'm sure for others. By this time, I assume most everybody in Piedmont knows I made some inappropriate Facebook posts. The bulk of these posts were reprints or links to articles that dealt with political issues our Council doesn't deal with, and some posts had titles or comments by me that were inflammatory or insulting. I especially regret and apologize for certain items that did not pertain to national politics. I'm not going to try to justify myself, because that would be impossible.

The country is going through a very difficult period. We have a president who has coarsened the national dialogue and made many people feel insulted. No matter what you think of his policies and programs, this is a reality that I and many other Republicans are coming to acknowledge. Perhaps we're too slow to do so, but sometimes it takes a while to pound things into our thick skulls. The last Council meeting was a salutary effort at pounding the point home to me. I've also had two weeks to contemplate the reaction many good people of our town have had to what I posted.

Most residents know Piedmont has become a very liberal city, and Republicans here are a vanishing element. While other folks do not agree with some policies that we favor, I like to think we share similar values, even though we may see different roads toward realizing our shared values. That will often be the case in a democracy, and politics should work on the principles of compromise and persuasion, and honest debate.

I learned the hard way that what one says on Facebook can come back to haunt you, and civility is essential. Jokes and comments may easily offend others.

As Mayor, I recognize that although I am just one of five council members who decide on issues, I understand that people demand more from their Mayor. When I speak about issues, I speak only for myself and not the other members of the City Council or city staff, but Mayors serve as symbols. I deeply regret the sad fact that I dragged the other members of the Council and City Staff into this mess through no fault – or desire -- of their own. I apologize to them.

I also apologize to the citizens of Piedmont. I want to make clear that I loathe and despise white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and racists. I loathe and despise them all and think they are un-American. I also loathe and despise violence because it leads to tragedies like the death of Heather Heyer.

I have received email from citizens saying I have made them or their families feel unsafe. I have also heard from conservatives who also feel unsafe and unable to express their views. I may be over-optimistic, but perhaps wiser heads than I can figure out ways to get these two groups talking to one another. As County Supervisor Keith Carson said in a *Piedmonter* opinion piece: "Most importantly, we must listen and hear what the other person in the conversation is saying. We must try to understand before we respond. Reopening honest constructive conversation is the first step to rebuilding what this administration is set on destroying." I could not agree more.

I'm sure people understand that I want to put this embarrassing and painful episode behind me, and regain some respect. I apologize deeply for the pain I've caused. I've learned a great deal from this, and experience can be a painful teacher. Going forward, I will restrict my Facebook posts to pictures of our pets and vacation pictures. Fortunately, I've never tweeted!